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HUNTING FOR THE PERFECT THIRTY-SIX

A conversation between Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, and Wallace Kadderly, Radio Service, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture's portion of the National Farm and Home Hour, Tuesday, December 26, 1939, over the NBC Blue Network.

--ooOoo--

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Our home economics reporter today is Miss Ruth O'Brien, Chief of the Division of Textiles and Clothing in the Bureau of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture. Miss O'Brien will tell us about a new way that the science of anthropometry is being put to work. It's the story of a research study in which a representative number of American women are being measured to get a better basis for sizing women's clothes.

Miss O'Brien -- even I -- a mere man -- even I have heard rumblings now and then from the distaff side in our household that indicate there are some very queer things about the way women's clothes are marked for size. Just the other day, Mrs. Kadderly was saying that the coat she's wearing was marked 11-year size.

RUTH O'BRIEN:

I was talking with a bride recently. She said her wedding dress was marked 10-year size. And she wasn't a child bride either. On the contrary she was a very dignified and experienced school teacher.

KADDERLY:

Well, it would seem to me that these size designations made without rhyme or reason lead to expense in making alterations.

O'BRIEN:

Yes, indeed, women have to spend a great deal of money getting clothes altered to fit. It's not uncommon to have to add 25% of the cost of a dress for alterations. And if we do our own sewing, the patterns often have to be altered.

KADDERLY:

From what you say the "perfect 36" must be more rare than we men have been led to believe.

O'BRIEN:

Well, the point is that nobody knows just what is a "perfect 36", or a perfect 40, or any other so-called perfect figure.

Clothes labeled the same size often have entirely different dimensions. In other words, each manufacturer has his own idea as to the measurements that fit the "perfect 36." Believe it or not, no study has ever been made of the body measurements needed for women's garment and pattern sizes. The garment dimensions now used have just grown up in the trade -- sort of like Topsy.

KADDERLY:

Miss O'Brien, about two years ago a project was undertaken to get facts which manufacturers could use in standardizing the sizes of children's clothing. This work you're talking about now...the study of women's body measurements...will it be as extensive as the children's project? As I recall, some 20 colleges and

(over)

KADDERLY: (Cont'd)

universities cooperated with the Bureau of Home Economics in that project...and about 150,000 children were measured.

O'BRIEN:

Almost that many...a few over 147,000 to be more exact. But we won't need that big a sample in making measurements of women. In the case of the children, we had to take growth into consideration. You may think you see women of many different sizes and shapes but they don't vary as much in size as children of different ages do.

KADDERLY:

How many women will you need to measure to give a proper basis for this standard system of sizes for women's clothes?

O'BRIEN:

Well, we hope to measure about 80,000 women....10,000 in each of seven States....that's 70,000....and 10,000 in the District of Columbia.

KADDERLY:

In seven States. Which seven?

O'BRIEN:

Arkansas, California, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

In each of these, a State WPA project has been set up to carry on the work. Universities and other agencies will cooperate...just as they did in the children's project.

KADDERLY:

Let's go back a bit. You say that you hope to measure 80,000 women. That should keep a lot of tape measures very busy.

O'BRIEN:

It's not only tapes! It's a whole kit of instruments. The science of anthropometry - the science of body measurements---you spoke of a moment ago---concerns itself chiefly with research on primitive races. But the instruments and the methods of measurement can be modified so that they can be used for taking any body measurements. That has been our job - to adapt the methods of this science to the practical problems of getting the measurements used in garment construction.

The Bureau is supplying the calibrated instruments used throughout the country. Training schools are conducted at which women who are to take the measurements are taught very exact measuring procedures. Then they are checked and rechecked until we are sure they can measure accurately and consistently. In other words, this is an example of scientific research with a very immediate practical application.

KADDERLY:

How many measurements are taken of each individual?

O'BRIEN:

Fifty-eight - those needed for sizing all kinds of garments, except hats, gloves, and shoes. We couldn't include those. No woman would be willing to stand still long enough for those measurements in addition to all the others.

KADDERLY:

How long does it take to make these 58 measurements?

O'BRIEN:

About half an hour.

KADDERLY:

Not very long. You shouldn't have much difficulty in finding women willing to give that much time.

O'BRIEN:

We're getting fine cooperation. But, of course, 80,000 is quite a large number when they must be measured one by one. And we do want to include all the longs and the shorts---the slims and the not so slims.

Perhaps some of the women listening now have seen accounts of this work going on in their communities. If so, I want to tell them that we will be delighted to have them come in to join those who are being measured.

KADDERLY:

(Ad lib conclusion.)

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